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ABSTRACT

Theoretical issues concerning research and policy-making and three empirical studies of the higher education sector in Sweden are discussed. A major concern is the utilization of social science research and development efforts by public policy makers. Additionally, the characteristics of the public policy-making processes that influence the scope and character of utilization are considered. Topics of empirical study include: the quantitative planning of higher education, social recruitment, the geographic location of higher education, policy-making organization of higher education, and educational methods in higher education. Additional concerns for empirical analysis are the part that research and development can and should play in the reform system of higher education and a followup of higher education reform in relation to cognitive production and the dissemination of knowledge. (SW)

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CURRENT PROJECT

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years Swedish R&D has tended more and more to be regarded as an important instrument in the realization of policy aims, perhaps the foremost manifestation of this approach being what is known as sectoral research policy. Briefly, this policy implies that sectoral authorities, above all Government departments and national administrative boards, should make more use of R&D results as an element of their regular activities. In concrete terms, the sectoral principle has led to the establishment within the administration of a large number of administrative units for R&D and to the provision of greater financial resources for sectorally delimited R&D activities. From the viewpoint of universities and colleges, which carry out the overwhelming proportion of the research involved, this means that an increasing proportion of available research funds is derived from sectoral authorities.

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The sectoral principle is undoubtedly no more than one element of a more wide-ranging doctrine which puts a positive value on the "scientification" of the public policy-making process. Other manifestations of the same doctrine can be seen, for example, in programme budgeting, future studies and social indicators. The emergence of sectoral research policy must be viewed in this context: it is one more in the series of aids (and certainly not the last) employed in pursuit of more rational policy making.

Today there is almost complete political unanimity concerning the sectoral principle. With due reservation for the fact that sectoral research must be balanced by sufficient measures on behalf of disciplinary basic research, all the main protagonists in research policy would probably agree that this policy has come to stay. Basic criticism is mainly to be heard from researchers, though comments even from this quarter are few in number and courteously phrased. It is argued that the sectoral principle leads to an impoverishment of university research, that the focus of research is often governed by political opportunism, that research is getting bureaucratized, and so on.

But on the whole, all is sweetness and light. The improvement which has taken place in the research climate in the past few years (in the sense of more voices in favour of more research) has accentuated this impression of the absence of problems. According to this way of looking at things, good research (the result of giving more money to the researchers) is bound to be utilized. The most important thing is to bank on disseminating the available results, on improving communications between researchers and policy makers (more money for research information).

A few voices (including the Administration Commission in SOU 1979:61 and Stevrin 1978) have observed, usually in deferential tones, that the utilization of R&D in public policy making ought not by any means to be taken for granted; rather it was a field which must be regarded as a problem.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In view of the non-problematizing attitude which has prevailed in Sweden regarding the question of research utilization, it is hardly surprising that research efforts have been few and far between. Moreover, the small number of projects undertaken on the subject have often presupposed a high degree of research utilization; this applies, for example, to studies of the reforms of the school system.

Internationally, however, a great deal has happened in this field during the past decade. Research into research utilization has assumed particularly impressive proportions in the United States, where many researchers have taken as their initial premise the existence of a utilization crisis. The enormous investments which began to be made in sectorally oriented social research in the United States during the 1960s have yielded a poor return. R&D results have not been utilized in the manner intended. With this problem in mind, a great deal of effort was devoted in the 1970s to explaining "where the fault lay", but also to developing the concept of research utilization.

One of the first steps taken in the course of our own project has been to review international literature on research utilization. The results of this review have been published in a special essay (Rune Premfors, "Social Research and Public Policy-Making: An Overview", Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift, 1979:4). Very briefly, this review taught us two things about research strategy. Firstly, research utilization is a highly complex concept. Any discussion of the part which R&D can and should play in public policy making must start with a realization of the composite character of the utilization concept. Secondly, we learned that many researchers in this field have arrived at the firm conclusion that the nature and scope of research utilization are to a great extent determined by the character of the policy-making process. This observation has an important bearing on the planning of a study like ours.

We should also mention that the focus of our project has to a great extent been determined by the previous research activities of the project staff. Its focus should be made clear by the list of publications given below.

MAIN POINTS OF INQUIRY

The project can be said to comprise a predominantly theoretical part focussing on the general problems connected with research and policy making and an empirically oriented part comprising three empirical studies of the higher education sector. Work under the project is guided by the following general questions.

(a) To what extent is R&D in the social sciences utilized in public policy making?

(b) In what ways are R&D results utilized in public policy-making processes?

(c) Which characteristics of the policy-making processes influence the scope and character of utilization?

(d) What characteristics of R&D results influence utilization?

(e) What are the dominant ideas in Swedish research policy concerning research utilization, policy-making processes and R&D results?

(f) What conclusions regarding (e) can be drawn from the analyses concerning (a) - (d)?

Our strategy is to problematize all three main concepts - research utilization, policy-making processes and R&D content. As should already have been made clear, we are confining ourselves to social research in the wider sense of "human sciences".

As has already been intimated, the *research utilization concept* has proved to be highly composite. For example, in an essay entitled "The Many Meanings of Research Utilization", Carol Weiss (see bibliography, below) has identified no less than seven different models concerning the relation between researchers and policy makers. Both in empirical studies of research utilization and with a view to practical R&D policy, it is highly important to realize the existence of these sometimes mutually exclusive and sometimes complementary models. But particular interest is likely to attach to the implications of two very different approaches, often respectively termed the "engineering" model and the "enlightenment" model. Briefly, the difference between them is that whereas in the engineering model R&D results are utilized directly, in the enlightenment model utilization is long term and often indirect. Whereas in the former model R&D activities can be steered relatively accurately, this is far more difficult in the latter model. And whereas in the engineering model R&D questions are handled as if they concerned the compilation of any other policy-making documentation, in the enlightenment model one's expectations concerning short-term effects have to be reduced so as to allow more or less the same assumption of risk as is traditionally associated with basic research; the general direction of research can be determined, but there is precious little else that can.

Clearly, then, research utilization is closely bound up with the character of the *public policy-making process*. Within the project we are now devoting considerable pains to problematizing the ideas behind the doctrine of the "scientification" of public policy making. Our starting point here is provided by a highly comprehensive corpus of political science literature in this field. The main discussion for our purposes is that which has centred round the degree of "rationality" in the public policy-making process. It is possible, if one wishes to do so, to characterize the contributions to this debate on a sliding scale, one end of which is a "synoptic"

approach, whereby policy making proceeds in conformity with scientific ideals of consistence and completeness, while the other is represented by contentions to the effect that any "rationality" that may occur is sheer coincidence. Clearly, the approach sometimes termed "incremental" comes closer to this end of the scale than to the other end. Perhaps the most seminal researchers in this tradition are Charles Lindblom and Aaron Wildavsky. This is not the time or the place to enlarge on their ideas or those of the "synoptic" approach, but we are convinced that the degree of rationality in policy making varies a great deal in time and between sectors. We are therefore taking some pains to analyse sectoral variations in research utilization. Partly this is being done on the basis of a stimulating essay in which Janet Weiss identifies five main factors influencing the degree and nature of research finding utilization in a sector.

Several researchers in recent years have put forward classifications of types of knowledge. (A Swedish contribution in this field has been made by Edmund Dahlström. Also see Holzner & Marx.) *R&D content* is also being problematized in our project, though to a lesser extent than policy-making processes and research utilization. The separation of R&D knowledge from other knowledge is a minimum requirement. We feel that it is important in this context to counteract a tendency on the part of researchers to overlook or even denigrate other types of knowledge. As has been made clear, for example, by Lindblom & Cohen and by James Rule, research-based knowledge is doomed in most contexts to be no more than a marginal contribution towards the solution of social problems. Craftsmanship, everyday knowledge etc probably play a more important part in the normal instance.

In the course of this project we are also considering the character of social research, although this is not one of our main tasks either. What do the products look like? To what extent do they meet "scientific" requirements as defined in the traditional ideal mainly associated with the natural sciences? If research results do not measure up to these requirements, what implications does this hold for research utilization? What will be the consequences of the other scientific ideals - action research, partisan research etc - which have gained ground in social research in recent years?

One problem on the cognitive side which appears worth discussing concerns the implications of the extremely inclusive R&D concept employed in research policy. What are the consequences of refraining in many contexts from any distinction between routine investigation and the collection of statistics on the one hand and, on the other, basic research activities in, say, the humanities? How is the inclusive R&D concept connected with the sectoral research principle and with

a "synoptic" approach to the public policy-making process?

EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

The intention is for the theoretical work to yield results of value to the current discussion of research policy. Our aim is to scrutinize critically some of the basic ideas underlying public research policy. In order to ensure that the theoretical discussion is rooted in reality, three empirically oriented sub-studies of the higher education sector are in progress within the project. These too, of course, are aimed at scrutinizing the relevant R&D problems in this sector, and in this way they can tie in with the wider cognitive development which has taken place and is still in progress within the Group for the Study of Higher Education and Research Policy. Needless to say, the three studies are all based on the "problematizing" approach to the relationship between R&D results and policy making which has been adopted for the project as a whole. A short description will now be given of each of the sub-studies.

1 Analysis and policy in higher education development

Starting from the realization that highly complex relations often exist between various forms of systematic analysis (R&D included) and policy development in different sectors of society, a historically based study is being made of the higher education sector. The following "policy dimensions" (see Premfors 1980 a) have been selected for this sub-study:

(A) the quantitative planning of higher education

(B) social recruitment in higher education

(C) the geographical location of higher education

(D) the policy-making organization of higher education

(E) educational methods in higher education.

One of the things which these dimensions have in common is that they have been in the focus of the debate on higher education policy for a long time. There is reason to believe that they capture most of the "fundamental problems" in the sector. Another important consideration is that quite a lot of research has been done in terms of these dimensions, which has made it fairly easy to obtain the synthesis of policy development during the past decades, which makes it possible to concentrate on the main point at issue, namely the role which systematic analysis, and more especially

social research, has occupied in policy development.

Nobody would deny that important reforms of higher education have been decided on in Sweden in the past few decades. By international standards these reforms have been quite radical, and yet in a long-term perspective one is struck by the continuity of the problems. Once the various dimensions have been defined as problematic, the problems have been attacked and redefined rather than solved. The idea of policy processes comprising sequences of "rational" steps as represented, for example, by the model goal definition - definition of problems - inventory of means - evaluation of consequences - choice of means - decision etc, appears fairly unfruitful when the higher education sector is considered in a long-term perspective. Means and ends cannot be meaningfully segregated. Instead, to use Lindblom's term, there is a continuous process of "reconstructive analysis" whereby "means" and "ends" are constantly being redefined in the light of new (and often unforeseen) conditions. An example from the higher education sector will perhaps serve to make this clear. There is no a priori reason for assuming that quantitative planning based on manpower forecasts has been introduced as a "means" in relation to a more general "end" in terms of higher education policy. An equally plausible interpretation is that the manpower analysis model first launched in the 1930s (by the Wicksell-Jerneman Commission in its "Report containing observations and proposals concerning recruitment in intellectual professions", SOU 1935:52) extensively determined the aspirations of the entire post-war period. The aims adopted depend as much on what one believes to be attainable as on abstractly formulated "goals".

This sub-study is not primarily aimed at contributing towards the history of higher education policy or social research. Its purpose is to increase our theoretical understanding of the connection between knowledge and policy. There is nothing very original about the research method employed: we are scrutinizing policy documents and, as the need arises, making in-depth studies of archives etc with reference to "critical" decisions. Interviews can play a supplementary part where the past few years are concerned, and a certain amount of material in this connection has already been collected, e g Bo Lindensjö's investigation of the U 68 process.

2 *R&D and higher education planning*

Our second sub-study has a different focus, being mainly concerned with a discussion of the part which R&D can and should play in the reformed system of higher education. Surveys of planning activities at various levels of higher education will lay the foundations of a discussion concerning the connections in which different types of R&D knowledge are likely to

influence planning content. In this study particular interest will focus on the analysis of variations between the different levels of the need and ability to utilize R&D results. What implications does the new decentralized and participatory organization hold for the forms and content of R&D activities? What conflicts of interest are there between different actors and levels?

Here as in other parts of the project, the starting point is a "problematized" view of R&D results, policy-making processes and R&D utilization. There is reason to suppose that planning in the higher education system has only a limited capacity for receiving research-based knowledge. Here as in most other public policy-making contexts, "interaction" (the policies of vested interests, market mechanisms etc) is more important than "analysis" (e g R&D knowledge) as a factor influencing policy-making content. Here as elsewhere, other types of knowledge play a decidedly greater part than R&D knowledge. In higher education as in other sectors, it is also to be expected that R&D knowledge will mainly affect policy making and policy development within the framework of "partisan analysis" rather than as policy-making documentation regarded as "objective" or "authoritative". Thus R&D-based knowledge should only be allotted a supplementary role in higher education planning, especially as R&D is both time consuming and prodigal of resources. Careful consideration should be given to the location of the strategic points at which the planning process is amenable to R&D inputs. Saying that we all need to "know more" is, of course, simply a way of evading these deliberations.

The sub-study has been arranged in the form of an exploratory survey of the "true agenda" of various policy-making bodies at all levels of the higher education system. Which planning problems are being tackled? What is the cognitive basis established? To what extent and in which forms does R&D knowledge come into the picture? In terms of research method, this sub-study is primarily a documentary and interview-based reconstruction of policy-making processes at different levels. Below central level, the inquiry is being limited to the Stockholm and Umeå higher education regions, and in view of its exploratory nature this should be sufficient. One good reason for choosing these regions can be said to consist in the fact that they have formed the subject of previous studies of policy-making processes and bodies.

3 *The UHÄ programme for the follow-up of the reform of higher education*

As part of the major reform of higher education since the mid-1970s, UHÄ has been conducting a special follow-up programme (described, for example, in R&D for Higher Education 1979:7). This is an ambitious and comprehensive programme incorporating many variations concerning both cognitive production and the dissemination of knowledge. It has been politically charged throughout; the various protagonists in the field of higher education policy have backed the evaluation of the higher education reform with very different hopes and expectations. The status of this programme as part of UHÄ's regular activities has been challenged, and this has led to the appointment of a special parliamentary group to monitor the follow-up programme, while at the same time causing pressure to be put on UHÄ to emphasize the "researcher control" of many of the projects included. Some of the results emerging from these activities have illustrated the thesis that the most important utilization of R&D knowledge in policy-making processes involving the politics of vested interests takes the form of "partisan analysis", with the different interests selecting the results which fit in best with their own programmes. Few results become "authoritative". This is not to say that all knowledge generated within the follow-up programme will necessarily meet with this fate; in all probability, careful analysis will also reveal examples of "facts speaking for themselves" and of R&D having helped to bring such facts to light.

Within the project we are keeping the various parts of the follow-up programme under close observation, though it should be made clear that we are only at the early stages of planning a "full-scale survey". It is clear that the main topics of inquiry in this sub-project and most of the analytical apparatus will come from the common arsenal of the project. Even if the investigation of the follow-up programme should turn out to be less comprehensive and thorough than the subject deserves, experience derived from it should of course be applicable to other sub-studies.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH CONTACTS

One of the important aims of the project is to link research with similar activities in other countries. As mentioned earlier, "utilization research" is particularly lively

in the United States, and we have established contacts with several researchers there. But contacts are also being maintained with European researchers, partly within the framework of the Research Committee on Science and Politics set up by the International Political Science Association.

Particular importance attaches to co-operation with a partly parallel project in Great Britain which is being led by Professor Maurice Kogan at Brunel University. Direct efforts are there being made to develop similar topics of inquiry and analyses, and there will be some opportunity of drawing comparative conclusions.

TIMETABLE AND REPORTING

The project began during the fiscal year 1979/80 and is planned to last for a total of three years. Sub-project 3 concerning the UHÄ follow-up programme may need to continue after the fiscal year 1981/82 if it acquires the desirable scope.

Successive reports will be presented on the various project activities, mainly in the series of reports published by the Group for the Study of Higher Education and Research Policy. It is hoped that a concise final report on the theoretical work will appear in book form in the special series of books published by the Group.

Rune Premfors

1980-05-23

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